

ESSAY

ON THE

Sabbath School Teacher; His Place and Power,

BY THE

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THE PLACE AND POWER OF THE SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

An aged woman once entered a Sabbath School leading by the hand two little children. Going up to the Superintendent, she presented the little ones to her, saying, "These are my grandchildren; remember that you take care of their souls. I commit them to you." This was done with a solemnity and impressiveness of voice and gesture which greatly touched the heart of the Superintendent. And, when left with the children, she felt constrained to put them in charge of a Teacher of tried faithfulness, and earnest piety, repeating to her the solemn admonition with which they had been committed to her care.

This is a true and admirable spirit in which both to give and take such a charge. For, the Sabbath School Teacher is emphatically the spiritual guide of the cluster of little ones under his care. His responsibilities, touching the highest interests of these deathless souls, are very grave. Akin, on the one hand, to those which the Pastor sustains to the souls of his flock; and, on the other hand, to those which the parent sustains to the souls of the children which God hath given him.

The true PLACE of the Sabbath School Teacher is one midway between the Pulpit and the Fireside. He can take the place neither of the Pastor nor of the Parent; but, as a fellow-worker with both, he bears to each an intimate and important relation. The Sabbath School Teacher has, essentially, the same end in view as the Pastor; and, in many ways, they are dependent on each other. Neither can fully prosper alone. They are designed for a relation of the most cordial and helpful sympathy. The whole School is but a part of the responsibility of the Pastor in his

ministry. "Feed my lambs," was the commission of Christ to His restored apostle. How often our blessed Master made special manifestation of his peculiar love for the little ones of the flock. "A Christ-loving Pastor is a child-loving Pastor." And shall the minister of Christ not look then upon all the agency of the Sabbath School, on Superintendents and Teachers, as but parts of his own ministry, as severally carrying out his own work, and helpers of his own peculiar joy?

The Teacher then is the Pastor's assistant. In one important part of the great field which the Pastor cultivates, the Teacher labours with the same end in view. He is like a pastor in miniature. The future flock come under his hand at a time when the heart is yet tender, and peculiarly susceptible to impression. His influence is brought to bear on the future hope of the church at a period when the whole character is plastic, and easily moulded into any abiding pattern. The faithful earnest teacher is the Pastor's right arm. He sees in such a fellow-worker a vital link in that chain of influence which draws and binds souls to Christ, and which makes them meet to serve and glorify Him on earth.

"In my judgment," says one, who, of all men, is entitled to speak with authority on this matter,—“there is no department of Christian labour more vitally influential upon the triumphs of the gospel,—more remunerative in its immediate results of blessing to the souls engaged,—more effective in maintaining and enlarging the best interests of the Christian Church, and the *most efficient operation of the Christian ministry.*” Dr. Tyng records this as his deliberate judgment, the result of his own large and varied experience in Sabbath School work.

In relation to the Parent, the Sabbath School Teacher occupies the place of an invaluable auxiliary. The Parent has a far greater stake in the issue of the work than the Teacher has. The relations of the Teacher to the children in this matter are only inferential and secondary; while those of the Parent are essential and primary. No Parent can rid himself of his responsibility to God to bring up his children in His nurture, to care for their souls as “one that must give account.” He can by no means transfer this burden to any other. If the work in the Sabbath School has the effect of weakening the sense of responsibility in the heart of any parent, it is an evil, and an abuse of a precious means of grace. The Sabbath School is designed to co-operate with Parents, to aid them in training up their children in God's ways, in fitting them for His service on earth, and His fellowship in Heaven.

Now, even the most careful parental instruction can receive

valuable help in the Sabbath School. The work there is not meant to supplant, but to supplement domestic teaching. Any attempt to establish a rivalry, or to prove an antagonism, between the work of the Parent and Teacher, can arise only from ignorance of this whole matter. A wise parent can understand that, in the social element of the Sabbath School, there is a valuable addition to all that the child can receive at the fireside. The Sabbath Scholar is brought into the Porch of the Church of Christ. He receives there an introduction to social christian life more systematic, more impressive to him, and more level to his capacity, than he can, or at least does receive, either in the Church or in the home. And no parent who loves his child, would willingly deprive him of this great advantage.

Where parents are careless or incapable, how absolutely essential the Sabbath School becomes. The Church of Christ must do its best to supply their lack. It cannot allow any child to grow up in irreligion and vice whom it has the means of reaching and reclaiming. This is one of the plainest of all duties, having its appeal to the christian conscience, individual and collective. The responsibility of a careless parent is not lessened because the Church of Christ lies under a like burden. We have here an instance of double responsibility ; and the shortcoming on the one side, only leaves the burden on the other untouched. The Church therefore must care for these untaught and neglected children ; and in what way can this be done more effectually than by the agency of the Sabbath School.

The Sabbath School Teacher thus stands midway between the Pulpit and the Fireside, bearing the relation both to pastor and parent of a fellow-worker with them in the labour to win souls for Christ. On both sides he deserves, and ought to receive, the most cordial sympathy. The Pastor is bereaved of half his strength, when he is not sustained by a band of earnest, faithful Sabbath School Teachers. And the parent would miss an invaluable aid were he deprived of the helpful cooperation of those who, with him, care for the souls of his children.

The mainspring of the Sabbath School Teachers' power, lies in a sincere and paramount *love to Christ*. His work, after all, is not mere instruction, not mere lessons in morality or scriptural knowledge ; it is to commend the blessed Gospel, and to win souls over to the faith and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. This can be accomplished best by one whose own soul is rejoicing in God his Saviour. When one Gospel is welling up in our own glad heart, and another glistening in the eye, and making itself heard in the tones of the voice, a few words will do more in the way of real

heart-work, and to further the great end in view, than years of diligent but dry routine.

There are, doubtless, subordinate elements of power which no faithful Sabbath School Teacher will neglect or contemn. He will strive to attain the best *methods*. He will not grudge labour to qualify himself to appear before his class thoroughly prepared for his work. He will seek to have a clear knowledge of the truths which are contained in the lesson, and to have them so arranged in his own mind as to be able to impart them in a distinct and impressive manner. Dr. Chalmers, while at St. Andrews, taught a Sabbath class for some time ; and he prepared as carefully for it, as he did for his class in the university. Notes of his lessons are still existing, in which the questions for the evening are all carefully written out. It is a great mistake to trust to the inspiration of the moment, and so to come before your class with no distinct knowledge of the lesson, and no definite plan arranged. A vague course of questions, or disjointed lecturing, seldom secures any thorough interest, or makes an abiding impression. Any method to impart more knowledge, and win a deeper attention, is felt to be of importance by every earnest teacher.

He will be glad of good *Implements*. In the Word of God we have one perfect in kind, and gloriously adapted for our work. This is the sword of the spirit, a weapon of temper tried. But in its skilful and effective use we may be materially aided by all those helps which have been provided. How much a good Concordance can do to enlarge our views of Scriptural truth, and make it more practically available. And what an interest can be thrown around many a lesson, by the stores of information drawn from a Bible Dictionary. Any aid which helps to increase his own knowledge of the Divine Word, or to invest it with a more varied interest, is sure to add a new efficiency to the teacher's work.

The faithful teacher will be careful of his *manner*. He feels instinctively that much of his success depends on this. A light or careless manner on the part of the teacher, goes far to prevent all good impression on the hearts of his scholars. A cold or hard manner, represses both interest and sympathy. The teacher, imbued with the truth spirit of his work, is preserved in great measure from such faults as these. When his own mind is alive to the greatness of the issue, and intent on reaching his great end, he must manifest a certain warmth and earnestness. He strives against any tendency to levity, against any temptation to impatience. Oftentimes his manner acquires a charm which the whole class is constrained to own, and which helps him mightily in all his labour.

A Teacher can do little without a *punctual regularity* in his work. This is an outgrowth of a true appreciation of the importance of his work, and of the earnest desire to see it crowned with success. It is a disheartening thing to fellow-teachers, as well as damaging to the influence of the teacher in his own class, when he is absent now and again from a light cause. Any hold over the hearts of your children is a lever in your hand to move them Christwards. And it is a grievous thing, for the sake of a little ease, to cast aside that which may be essential to success at some critical moment. Irregular attendance on the part of the teacher induces the same fault on the part of his scholars; and the evil grows until it may be past remedy. Among all the subordinate elements of power, this is one which the faithful teacher is careful to maintain. He strives, by his own persevering, self-denying care for them, to impress the conviction deep on the hearts of his scholars, that he, at least, considers his work a great work. And so he commends both himself and his message to all under his care.

But these, and every other element of power and success, must be held subordinate altogether to a vital piety. The true power of the Sabbath School teacher lies in his love to Christ: a love begotten in his heart by the knowledge and belief of Christ's love to him. When the heart is awake to all that Christ hath done for our own salvation, we learn to care for the souls of others with something of His own Spirit. The very blessedness we ourselves now enjoy, is the spring of a yearning pity for those who are still unsaved. With a new wisdom and urgency we plead with our scholars for Christ, and every heart instinctively owns the presence of a new persuasive power.

"A young lady had charge of a Bible-class of fourteen girls. She taught them conscientiously for years without any visible success. She then lost a very dear and intimate friend, and spent some weeks with the relative in whose house her friend died. During this period of sequestration the Spirit of God had been drawing her mind away from the world, and fixing it more intently on heavenly and everlasting things. At the end of these weeks she returned to her class; but now she met her old scholars with very altered feelings. She was filled with love to their souls, and had a desire to glorify God such as she had never felt before. She gave out a hymn; and such was the solemnity of her manner and the earnestness of her tone, that in the reading of that hymn one of the scholars was pierced to the heart, and was led at once to cry, "What must I do to be saved?" The lesson for next Sabbath was the freeness of the Gospel offer, and the young people were to search the Bible for instances. When they met that

Sabbath, every heart was too full to speak, and the whole class sat silent, bowed before the felt presence of God. And the result of this awakening was, that eleven of the fourteen pupils gave evidence of real conversion, and became exemplary followers of the Lord Jesus. On one or two Sabbaths of spiritual instruction,—when the heart was full and God was glorified,—a blessing rested which had been withheld for a long succession of conscientious but customary Sabbath-services."

Love to Christ as our own Saviour gives the *power of a definite aim*. A special requisite for successful work is a distinct apprehension of the work to be done. The Sabbath School Teacher with the love of Christ in his heart, sees something higher on which to expend his time and labour than mere instruction. He does not work uncertainly ; nor like one beating the air. In all he does he has the aim of winning souls for Christ. With a heart alive to the greatness of this end, because of his own sense of the divine mercy, he now makes all things subsidiary to its accomplishment. Each hour spent with his class, is an opportunity to win some soul over to Christ's love and service. This great end clearly in view is a constant wellspring of zeal and vigor to the faithful teacher, animating him to abounding labors.

The love of Christ gives the power of the *best preparation*. There may be careful study of the lesson, and varied information gathered from every quarter, but all that dead material requires to be informed by the right spirit. The Teacher, himself alive to spiritual things, will come before his class feeling the burden of weighty responsibility. This will give an emphasis to every word he utters. Moved by the Spirit of Christ, his heart is warmed by love for souls ; and this invests all his teaching with a new wisdom and persuasiveness. The hidden emotion of his own soul while seeking to draw others to Christ is felt, even when not seen, and by a subtle magnetism attracts and arrests all those who come within its range.

Love to Christ gives the power of the *best instrumentality*. Even with the use of the best method, the best implements, and with the most earnest and intelligent work, it is not in ourselves to reach the highest results. Even when a soul is awakened, and comes asking—what must I do to be saved ? how utterly powerless we are to dispel the spiritual darkness, and bring the inquirer unto saving light. Where is our help at that crisis ?—"It is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, said the Lord." But it is only the man spiritually alive himself who fully knows this, and who in the face of difficulties, otherwise insuperable, knows where to look for effectual help. He knows that that Spirit is promised

to them that ask. He is driven to the throne of grace by the sense of his dependence on this aid. And going thence in the power of the Spirit he is armed with weapons mighty through God for the accomplishment of all his work.

Love to Christ gives the *power* of the *strongest motive* to prosecute the work. There is no motive so deep and all-pervading as the love of Christ. It is the mainspring of all true, earnest, persevering labour for Him. When we connect our work in the Sabbath School with this motive power, it breathes into all the breath of a new life. The love of Christ was the master-principle of the life of Paul, the motive for his vast and ceaseless labours to win souls for Him. He drank deep into the spirit of his beloved Master, specially in his travail of soul for the salvation of men. We stand in awe before him as we hear him speak. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." How hard for us with our narrow hearts to take the height of this aspiration, or to penetrate the depth of its spring. "There is more here than an effusion of disinterested benevolence, more than an expression of sacred patriotism. It is an ejaculation from a great heart, filled with all goodness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, compassion, tenderness; touched with a recollection of its former sinfulness; alive to all the ties of kindred and country; crucified to every selfish feeling; quickened and inflamed by the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ." We stand afar off, and with bowed head, before such Christlike zeal and love. But, nevertheless, here is the true spirit, in the essence of it, which alone can fit us fully to labor for Christ. Love to Him who first loved us is the *power* which alone sustains the heart and fits us for success.

An unconverted Teacher may be successful to a certain extent. Zeal, and earnestness, and intelligence, on his part, cannot fail of their effect. He may be used by God, as a blind instrument, for furthering the very highest end in view. But, what a pitiable position an unconverted Sabbath School Teacher occupies! He is busy about the spiritual temple, but he is not a living stone in it, built up on Christ. He serves some such purpose as the scaffolding, which though useful so far, yet encumbers and deforms the building all the time of its erection. When the copingstone has been fitted to its place, and the whole structure stands forth in fair proportions, the scaffolding is thrown down, and trodden in the mire, as a thing of nought. The unconverted Sabbath School

Teacher is busied about the things of eternal life, and yet has no part in that life itself. He may be helpful to another in attaining it, and yet he himself remains unblessed. Now, who can paint the wretchedness of being so near salvation, and yet remaining short of it? How pitiable! this shipwreck at the mouth of the harbour! this standing at the gate of heaven! and yet, the being shut out into the outer darkness!

Be in Christ yourself, and then labor for Him. First taste the blessedness of His saving grace, and then you are qualified to speak for Him. A German divine had a picture of Christ on the cross hung up in his study, and to stimulate his diligence in his Master's service, he inscribed underneath the picture these two lines—

"I did all this for thee.
What wilt thou do for me?"

But better than this is the believing look on the Saviour making the heart alive to the sense of His love to us, and kindling the desire then to live for Him. Then, we seem to hear Him say—

"I gave my life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou mightst ransom'd be,
And quickened from the dead:

I gave my life for thee: What hast thou given for me?

My Father's home of light,
My rainbow circled throne,
I left for earthly night,
For wand'rings sad and lone:

I left it all for thee: What hast thou left for me?

And I have brought to thee,
Down from my home above,
Salvation full and free,
My pardon and my love:

Great gifts I brought to thee: What hast thou brought to me?

When the heart is awake to these voices, sounding out from the cross on Cavalry, it cannot but say:

O let my life be given,
My years for Him be spent,
World-fetters all be riven,
And joy with service blent:

I bring my worthless all: I follow my Saviour's call."

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that *your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" Yes—"in the Lord." Be Christ's first: then labor for Him.

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